



Quick Ten-Step Refutation Of Sola Scriptura

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Sola Scriptura Is Not Taught In The Bible

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Scripture certainly is a “standard of truth” (we agree fully with Protestants), even the preeminent one, but not in a sense that rules out the binding authority of authentic apostolic Tradition and the Church. The Bible doesn’t teach that. Catholics agree with Protestants that Scripture is materially sufficient. In other words, every true doctrine can be found in the Bible, if only implicitly and indirectly by deduction. But no biblical passage teaches that Scripture is the formal authority or Rule of Faith for the Christian (formal sufficiency), in isolation from the Church and Apostolic Tradition. Sola Scriptura can’t even be deduced from implicit passages. Protestants try to make that argument, but (with all due respect) I think the effort is doomed to failure. I’ve never seen it, and I’ve discussed the issue with Protestants many, many times in the 13 years since my conversion.

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"Word Of God"

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"Word" in Holy Scripture quite often refers to a proclaimed, oral word of prophets or apostles. Prophets spoke the word of God, whether or not their utterances were later recorded as written Scripture. So for example, we read in Jeremiah 25:3,7-8 (NIV):

3 For twenty-three years- . . . the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, . . .

7 "But you did not listen to me," declares the LORD , . . .

8 Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words,

This was the word of God or word of the Lord whether or not it was recorded in writing or made it into later canonized Scripture. It had equal authority in writing or as proclamation-never-reduced-to-writing. This was also true of apostolic preaching. When the phrases word of God or word of the Lord appear in Acts and the Epistles, they almost always refer to oral preaching, not to Scripture. For example:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 . . . when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God

If we compare this passage with another, written to the same church, Paul appears to regard tradition and word of

God as synonymous:

2 Thessalonians 3:6 . . . keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

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Tradition Is Not A Dirty Word

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Protestants often quote the verses in the Bible where corrupt traditions of men are condemned (e.g., Matt 15:2-6, Mk 7:8-13, Col 2:8). Of course, Catholics agree with this. But it's not the whole truth. True, apostolic traditions are also positively endorsed. These traditions are in total harmony with and consistent with Scripture. In that sense, Scripture is the "final Judge" of Tradition, but not in the sense that it rules out all binding Tradition and Church authority. Here are a few relevant verses (RSV):

1 Corinthians 11:2 I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 . . . stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth, or by letter.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me . . . guard the truth which has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

2 Timothy 2:2 And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Jude 3 . . . contend for the faith which was once for all

delivered to the saints.

[cf. Acts 2:42, which mentions “the apostles’ teaching”]

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Jesus And Paul Accepted Non-Biblical Oral And Written Traditions

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Protestants defending sola Scriptura will claim that Jesus and Paul accepted the authority of the Old Testament. This is true, but they also appealed to other authority, outside of written revelation. For example:

A) Matthew 2:23: the reference to “. . . He shall be called a Nazarene “ cannot be found in the Old Testament, yet it was passed down “by the prophets.” Thus, a prophecy, which is considered to be “God’s Word” was passed down orally, rather than through Scripture.

B) Matthew 23:2-3: Jesus teaches that the scribes and Pharisees have a legitimate, binding authority, based on Moses’ seat, which phrase (or idea) cannot be found anywhere in the Old Testament. It is found in the (originally oral) Mishna, where a sort of “teaching succession” from Moses on down is taught.

And now two examples from the Apostle Paul:

C) In 1 Corinthians 10:4, St. Paul refers to a rock which “followed” the Jews through the Sinai wilderness. The Old Testament says nothing about such miraculous movement, in the related passages about Moses striking the rock to produce water (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2-13). But rabbinic tradition does.

D) 2 Timothy 3:8: “As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses . . . “ These two men cannot be found in the related Old Testament passage (Exodus 7:8 ff.), or anywhere else in the Old Testament.

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Jerusalem Council

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In the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-30), we see Peter and James speaking with authority. This Council makes an authoritative pronouncement (citing the Holy Spirit) which was binding on all Christians:

Acts 15:28-29: For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.

In the next chapter, we read that Paul, Timothy, and Silas were traveling around “through the cities,” and Scripture says that:

... they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem.

(Acts 16:4)

This is Church authority. They simply proclaimed the decree as true and binding — with the sanction of the Holy Spirit Himself! Thus we see in the Bible an instance of the gift of infallibility that the Catholic Church claims for itself when it assembles in a council.

Pharisees, Sadducees, And Oral, Extrabiblical Tradition

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Christianity was derived in many ways from the Pharisaical tradition of Judaism. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were much more heretical. They rejected the future resurrection and the soul, the afterlife, rewards and retribution, demons and angels, and predestinarianism. The Sadducees were the theological liberals of that time. Christian Pharisees are referred to in Acts 15:5 and Philippians 3:5, but the Bible never mentions Christian Sadducees. The Sadducees also rejected all authoritative oral teaching, and essentially believed in sola Scriptura. So neither the (orthodox) Old Testament Jews nor the early Church were guided by the principle of sola Scriptura. The Pharisees (despite their corruptions and excesses) were the mainstream Jewish tradition, and both Jesus and Paul acknowledge this.

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Old Testament Jews Did Not Believe In Sola Scriptura / Necessity Of Interpretation

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To give two examples from the Old Testament itself:

A) Ezra 7:6,10: Ezra, a priest and scribe, studied the Jewish law and taught it to Israel, and his authority was binding, under pain of imprisonment, banishment, loss of goods, and even death (7:25-26).

B) Nehemiah 8:1-8: Ezra reads the law of Moses to the people in Jerusalem (8:3). In 8:7 we find thirteen Levites who assisted Ezra, and who helped the people to understand the law. Much earlier, we find Levites exercising the same function (2 Chronicles 17:8-9). In Nehemiah 8:8: . . . they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

So the people did indeed understand the law (Neh 8:12), but not without much assistance – not merely upon hearing. Likewise, the Bible is not altogether clear in and of itself, but requires the aid of teachers who are more familiar with biblical styles and Hebrew idiom, background, context, exegesis and cross-reference, hermeneutical principles, original languages, etc. The Old Testament, then, teaches about a binding Tradition and need for authoritative interpreters, as does the New Testament:

C) And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch . . . seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah . . . So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless some one guides me?”
(Acts 8:27-28, 30-31)

D) . . . no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation. (2 Peter 1:20)

E) . . . So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him . . . There are some things in them [Paul’s letters] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

F) With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. (Mark 4:33-34)

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2 Timothy 3:16-17: The Protestant "Proof Text"

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All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (RSV)

This passage doesn't teach formal sufficiency, which excludes a binding, authoritative role for Tradition and Church. Protestants extrapolate onto the text what isn't there. If we look at the overall context of this passage, in 2 Timothy alone, Paul makes reference to oral Tradition three times (1:13-14, 2:2, 3:14). And to use an analogy, let's examine a very similar passage, Ephesians 4:11-15:

And his gifts were that some should be apostle, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are able to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

If 2nd Timothy 3 proves the sole sufficiency of Scripture,

then by analogy, Ephesians 4 would likewise prove the sufficiency of pastors, teachers and so forth for the attainment of Christian perfection. In Ephesians 4:11-15 the Christian believer is equipped, built up, brought into unity and mature manhood, knowledge of Jesus, the fulness of Christ, and even preserved from doctrinal confusion by means of the teaching function of the Church. This is a far stronger statement of the perfecting of the saints than 2 Timothy 3:16-17, yet it doesn't even mention Scripture.

So if all non-scriptural elements are excluded in 2 Timothy, then, by analogy, Scripture would logically have to be excluded in Ephesians. It is far more reasonable to recognize that the absence of one or more elements in one passage does not mean they are nonexistent. The Church and Scripture are both equally necessary and important for teaching. And of course this is the Catholic view.

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Paul Casually Assumes That His Passed-Down Tradition Is Infallible And Binding

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If Paul wasn't assuming that, he would have been commanding his followers to adhere to a mistaken doctrine. He writes, for example:

2 Thessalonians 3:14 If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

Romans 16:17: . . . take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them.

Paul didn't write: . . . in opposition to the pretty-much, mostly, largely true but not infallible doctrine which you have been taught . . .

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Sola Scriptura Is A Radically Circular Position

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When all is said and done, Protestants who accept sola Scriptura as their Rule of Faith appeal to the Bible. If they are asked why one should believe in their particular denominational teaching rather than another, each will appeal to the “Bible’s clear teaching” and oftentimes act as if they have no tradition which guides their own interpretation.

This is similar to people on two sides of a legal, constitutional debate both saying, “well, we go by what is constitutional, whereas you guys don’t.” The U.S. Constitution, like the Bible, is not sufficient in and of itself to resolve differing interpretations. Judges and courts are necessary, and their decrees are binding. Supreme Court rulings cannot be overturned except by a future Supreme Court or by constitutional amendment. In any event, there is always a final appeal which settles the matter.

But Protestantism lacks this because it appeals to a logically self-defeating principle and a book (which must always be interpreted by human beings). Obviously (given the divisions in Protestantism) simply “going to the Bible” hasn’t worked. In the end, a person has no assurance or certainty in the Protestant system. They can only “go to the Bible” themselves and perhaps come up with another doctrinal version of some disputed doctrine to add to the list. One either believes there is one truth in any given theological

dispute (whatever it is) or they adopt a relativist or indifferentist position, where contradictions are fine or where the doctrine is so “minor” that differences “don’t matter.”

But the Bible doesn’t teach that whole categories of doctrines are “minor” and that Christians can freely and joyfully disagree in such a fashion. Denominationalism and divisions are vigorously condemned. The only conclusion we can reach from the Bible is what we call the “three-legged stool”: Bible, Church, and Tradition are all necessary to arrive at truth. If you knock out any leg of a three-legged stool, it collapses.

taken from <http://socrates58.blogspot.com/2006/11/quick-ten-step-refutation-of-sola.html>

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